

**AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION**

Please place the paragraph below at page 1, beginning at line 2:

**-- CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS**

This application claims the benefit of and priority to International Application Serial No. PCT/US2003/041068 filed December 22, 2003, which, in turn, claims the benefit of and priority to U.S. Provisional Application Serial No. 60/435,223 filed on December 20, 2002, entitled "VACUUM ASSISTED SURGICAL STAPLER", and incorporates its entire contents by reference herein. --